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"Uncle Sam to the Rescue...*No Joke!!*"

By Rep. Allen Boyd

The federal government is often criticized for being out of touch with the concerns of American citizens, and failing to meet the people's needs in a timely and efficient manner. However, today, I would like to highlight an area where federal agents have been successfully working in sync with state officials to meet the most urgent demands of North Floridians.

As I have traveled throughout the Second Congressional District of Florida over the last month, I have viewed the extensive destruction to homes, businesses, and farmland as a result of the ravaging flood waters we experienced earlier this year. At the same time, I have witnessed the remarkably well orchestrated response to this disaster on the part of our state, local and federal emergency agencies and organizations. Throughout the communities which I have visited, numerous people have shared with me their positive experience in dealing with the various agencies charged with providing assistance.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration, working together with their state level counterparts and local volunteer organizations, arrived on the flood scene immediately to aid in the evacuations and to begin accepting applications for financial assistance. FEMA quickly established a toll-free hotline, operating six days a week, which storm victims could call to apply for disaster assistance. Hundreds of callers were referred to other agencies for agricultural assistance, crisis counseling and tax assistance. In addition, FEMA opened several temporary local offices to administer aid, seven days a week, and state and federal agencies organized a mobile Disaster Recovery Center which traveled throughout the district. Folks who contacted my Tallahassee and Panama City offices were referred to FEMA where they were responded to and taken care of promptly.

Clearly, our emergency management systems have come a long way since the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew. Florida residents, in enduring the devastation of so many natural disasters, have learned to develop an emergency response plan that runs like a "well-oiled machine." While no plan is ever perfect, I would like to commend our state and federal agencies for their work in reforming storm warning procedures, evacuation plans and the application process for receiving state and federal aid. Furthermore, I want to thank all the volunteers who spent countless hours helping those in need.

El Nino has hit several of our counties hard, leaving many families, business owners, and farmers with major losses and no where to turn. The funding distributed by our emergency agencies is providing critical assistance to those who have suffered under these unpredictable weather conditions, but more importantly, the compassion and care with which these officials have responded is providing hope to those who have lost so much.